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USDA APPOINTS BENNETT TO HEAD RURAL DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS IN COLORADO

WASHINGTON, March 31, 2006 - Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns today announced the appointment of Mike Bennett as state director for USDA Rural Development in Colorado.

"Mike Bennett brings to Rural Development extensive experience in business finance, management and a passion for community involvement," said Johanns. "I welcome Mike to President Bush's leadership team and look forward to working with him to further strengthen rural Colorado through economic opportunities and community development."

Bennett currently serves as the President of the Heritage Bank for the Boulder region, a position held since May of 2003. He has over 22 years of experience in the banking business and has served in the capacity of Administrative Assistant and Chief of Staff for United States Senator Wayne Allard.

A resident of Fort Collins, Bennett earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from Colorado State University and is a graduate of the University of Colorado Graduate School of Banking. He and his wife D'Ann have four children.

USDA Rural Development's mission is to deliver programs in a way that will support increasing economic opportunity and improve the quality of life of rural residents. As a venture capital entity, Rural Development has invested over \$63 billion since the beginning of the Bush Administration to provide equity and technical assistance to finance and foster growth in homeownership, business development, and critical community and technology infrastructure. As a result, over 1.1 million jobs have been created or saved through these investments. Further information on rural programs is available at a local USDA Rural Development office or by visiting USDA's web site at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>

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